

Valley of Cascade Creek
(Bull Creek), Austin, Texas.

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11th Grade

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Austin 5, Texas

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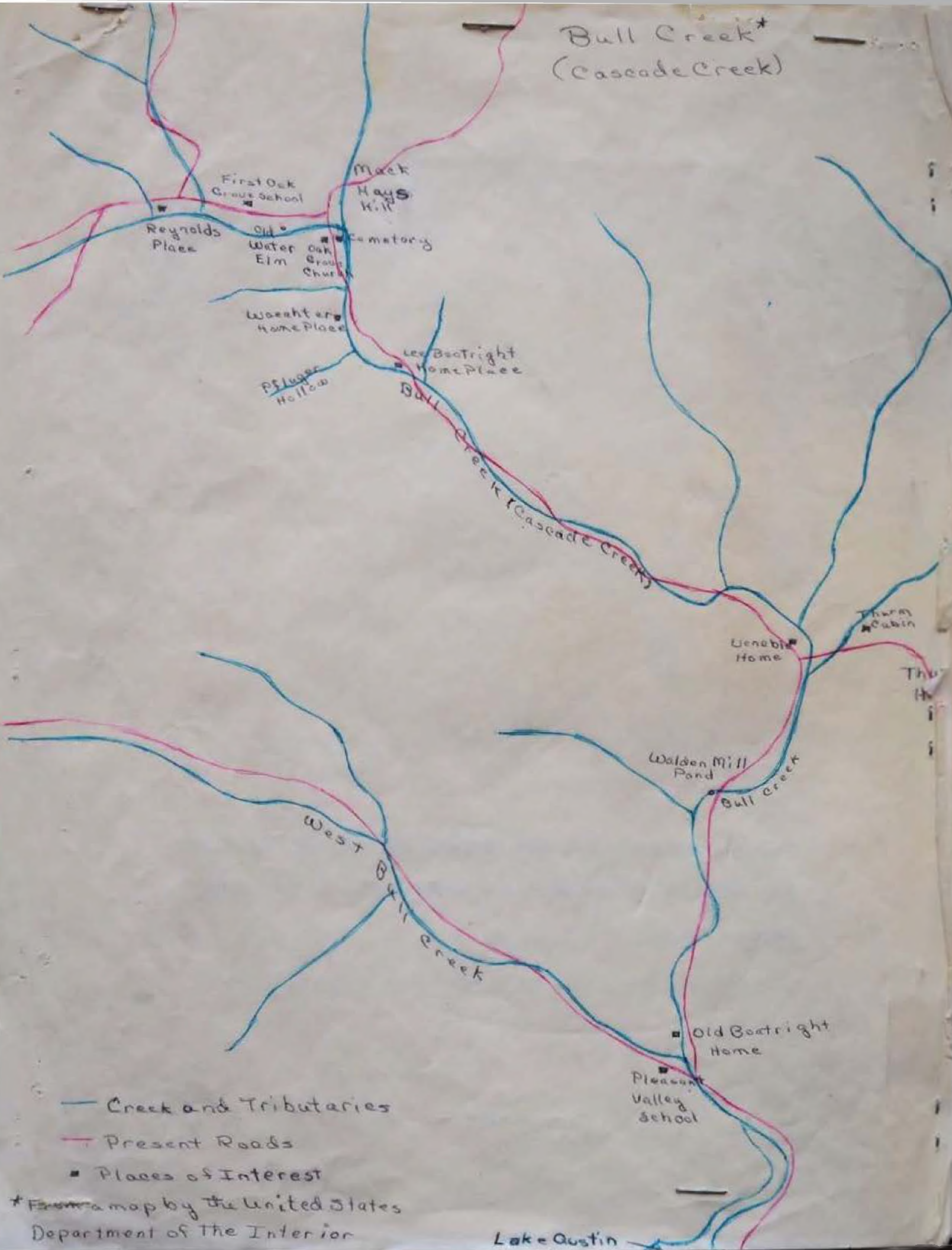


American-Statesman/UPI

WEALTH OF HISTORY — Winners in the annual Austin-Travis County Historical Essay Contest haven't quenched their thirst for knowledge of Austin's past. They are pictured here in the Austin-Travis County Collections at the library. First prize winner is Cathryn Richards, right, daughter of Mr. and

Mrs. W. L. Richards. Second prize winner is Larkin Prewitt, left, son of Mr. and Mrs. W. M. Prewitt. Sandra Milburn, whose parents are Mr. and Mrs. B. E. Milburn, is third place winner. The contest is sponsored each year by Friends of the Austin Public Library and The American-Statesman.

Bull Creek* (Cascade Creek)



— Creek and Tributaries

— Present Roads

■ Places of Interest

* From a map by the United States
Department of the Interior

Lake Austin

THE VALLEY OF CASCADE CREEK

Nestled in the hills northwest of Austin is a remote valley cut by old Cascade Creek which has rushed for hundreds of years to add its' weight to the mighty Colorado River. In its rush it has hewed at the hills and has torn away from the valley depths over 200 feet of rich soil. Along the winding, spring-fed creek is a long narrow valley composed of small rocky fields which face across the creek to twelve high cliffs which the meanders of the creek have cut. Hugging the valley are hills which are covered with cedar and scruboak. In the coves and hollows, in the rockstrewn fastnesses of cedar, in the valley and along the tributaries generations of hard-working families have lived.

They were fierce, proud people who preserved the customs and manners of their ancestors. Some of them were descendents of mountaineers from Missouri and regions east of the Mississippi. Others came from Europe and settled in the valley. Such names as Thurm, Waechter, Prewitt, Preece, Boatright and Jaeger were carried down through generations and still remain as names of people and places along the creek. Through much intermarriage the people along the valley became closely-knit and clannish. They were wary of strangers but welcomed those they knew with great courtesy and open hospitality.

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Among the families who settled on Cascade Creek in the latter half of the nineteenth century were two prominent families whose descendents still live in the area. William Thurm came to Texas from Germany with his wife and three girls in 1850. After living for a time in Fredericksburg, he moved to Austin and purchased a number of acres along Bull Creek, or Cascade Creek as they knew it. Living in a three-room log cabin at the foot of the hill still known by the name "Thurm Hill", they raised their children, sending them to school whenever a teacher was available but giving them the majority of their education in the home. As the three girls grew up, William Thurm deeded property to each of them. Miss Betty, a spinster, was given the Home Place, Mrs. Tena Venable received land lying in the bend of Bull Creek at the south end of the valley, and Mrs. Louise Waechter was given land which was situated near the upper end of the valley, about two or three miles from the Venable home. The daughters lived a pleasant, though hard, life with their families on the lands given them by their father, earning a living from the land, going to church at the northern end of the valley and taking an active part in the social life of the community. Two of them married men of the valley, Louise marrying August Waechter, whose parents lived not far away, and Tena marrying Isaac Melvin Venable, a schoolteacher at Oak Grove School, who had been a Yankee soldier in the War Between The

States. It is not known just what brought him to Texas but his sister and mother followed him to Bull Creek and the sister married M. H. Hays, for whom the hill at the upper end of the valley, Mack Hays Hill, is names. William Thurm's grandchildren grew up to know and love the valley, to marry and make their homes among the small fields and high hills of Bull Creek.

In 1845 a young boy named Boatright living in Missouri volunteered for the Mexican War. When the war ended, the soldiers were released to find their own way home as best they could. Mr. Boatright came as far north as Cuero and, while working there for a time, met and married a Cuero girl. Deciding to stay in Texas, he soon had a team and wagon and began to earn a living hauling freight from Cuero and the coast to Austin and Fredericksburg. Years passed and, because neither he nor his wife could read or write, he had no word of his family in Missouri. One day in the presence of the schoolteacher, he remarked that he wished he might hear from his people and she volunteered to write to Missouri for him. The letter was returned with the note that they had moved away and might be found in either Hutto or Round Rock, Texas. Immediately he found a load of goods to be brought to Austin and, having delivered it, he located his family and visited with them. As soon as possible he moved from Cuero to Austin and settled on land at the intersection

of Bull Creek and West Bull Creek. Lee B. Boatright, one of his sons, in 1884 moved to a log cabin near the middle of the upper reaches of Bull Creek. There he raised his family of four boys and one girl. Sometime about 1911 or 1913 Jesse Prewitt, who had married one of the Venable girls, bought this land from Boatright, moved the log cabin to be used as a barn and storage bin, and built a frame house in which he and his wife lived for thirty years. After Mr. Prewitt's death, Mrs. Prewitt sold the land to Tim Boatright, who had been born in the log cabin when it was his father's home. Thus since 1884, this particular place has had only three owners.

The people who were raised in the valley and those who moved there have found occupations in innumerable ways. Even with the variety of these jobs, they all had one thing in common, the use of the land. All of the occupants of the valley worked hard to make a living from the land. Many families who owned land sold the cedar either as fence posts or by allowing others to come in and cut posts and wood for charcoal. Those on the richer, fertile land had truck gardens and raised cattle and goats. Jesse Prewitt, for example, raised cattle and butchered for the Austin markets for almost thirty years. Because the valley of Cascade Creek was open range, there were great numbers of cattle roaming over the hills and it is possible that from these cattle the name of the creek was

gradually changed to Bull Creek and the old name of Cascade Creek was forgotten. The younger men who did not own land worked for those who did, cutting fence posts to be shipped out of Austin or used on the land they were cut from, fencing the pastures and farming the small fields. In every hollow for many years there were as many as fourteen to sixteen families camping in tents or living in caves to be found in the hollows, earning their living by cutting cedar and burning it for charcoal, then selling it in Austin. At the head of Pfluger Hollow is a large cave, worn by hundreds of years of water erosion. There a family lived for many years, raising eight children in the cave. When people came to visit them, they would sweep off the charcoal bed and have a party or dance. Apparently the cave life did not deter their daughters' suitors, for all of the girls were married while their parents lived there. After they left the cave, for a time Louise's son, August Waechter, lived there, then it was abandoned as a home.

Schooling for the people was provided by Oak Grove and Pleasant Valley Schools. An old school building is still located at Pleasant Valley but it is no longer attended by the valley children. The old Oak Grove School building was a twenty by twenty foot frame room with one teacher. At times as many as sixty children attended, and there was a great feeling of relief when the Methodist Church

sold their abandoned building to the school trustees for the sum of fifty dollars. The new school was much larger, more centrally located and served as a church on Sundays. In 1950 this building was sold and moved to a nearby pasture where it is now a home. Since the Oak Grove cemetery is located across the road from the school-church, families who had relatives buried in the cemetery gave money for a new concrete block church which is now used for church services and funerals.

Originally the people of the Oak Grove community were buried in the Pond Springs Cemetery near Jolleyville; however, perhaps during an epidemic of summer diarrhea, five small children were buried in the churchyard at Oak Grove. Since this was close to the community, other people requested burial in the churchyard and thus the Oak Grove Cemetery came into being.

Entertainment in the valley was informal and seldom planned. People generally had small gatherings and knowledge of these was passed by word-of-mouth. There weren't any fancy refreshments but there was always plenty of music, played on violin, guitar and piano by the people in the community. Other social gatherings were funerals, "debating society" meetings and church services. Swimming could be done anywhere along the creek, but the special swimming place was under the old mill site in the mill pond, above which Mr. Walton had had a

grist mill in the early days. The only planned entertainment was the yearly barbeque under the old Water Elm in the Cromeans' pasture. On election years the barbeque was paid for by hopeful candidates. In other years Mr. Cromeans furnished the meat and a small fee was charged for both the food and the dance. Musicians came from as far away as Cypress Creek and the pasture was filled with the buggies and wagons of the people who attended, for this one yearly event drew as many as five to six hundred people. These barbeques were held for many years on the Fourth of July until Mr. Walton, at the southern end of Bull Creek, started giving a second barbeque on the same day. At this time the Cromeans changed the date of the barbeque to June 26th. The last barbeque under the old Water Elm was held in 1916. A storm that winter split the tree and broke the top out. In 1920 L. J. Waechter revived the barbeques, holding them under the big bluff on the land he had purchased from his mother. It was there that Steve Heffington gave his first campaign speech for the office of Tax Assessor-Collector of Travis County in 1921.

For the man of the valley there was always the combination occupation and entertainment of hunting. Deer roamed the hills, as they still do, and fox, coon, bob cat and panther skins brought in money. One night, driving home from the church at the upper end of the valley, Mr. and Mrs. Prewitt passed along the creek road under a

high bluff. Suddenly from the heights rose a terrifying scream. More screams followed, exciting the horses and causing Jesse to reach for his only weapon, a buggy whip. When a small dog nearby began barking excitedly and the screams ceased, they realized that it was a panther stalking them from the cliffs above. At this point Mr. Prewitt loosed the reins, applied the whip and raced the last mile home.

On the west fork of the upper creek there still remains standing one of the original log cabins. Two generations ago it was known as the "Reynolds Place".¹ Then it was sold by Sarah A. Reynolds, an unmarried woman, to Franz Jaeger in May of 1891. The Jaegers lived there for twenty-four years before selling the land to P. J. Waechter, another of Louise's sons. In later years L. J. Waechter owned it, but from the time Franz Jaeger lived there to the present time, old-timers know this particular tract of land and the log cabin there as the "Jaeger Place".² Although additions have been made and the log joints have been recalked, when one enters the screened porch, the old logs, fifteen feet long and eighteen inches square at the butt, are clearly visible. Since the land was sold by L. J. Waechter, many people have lived in the house. It is still well-preserved and at

¹From interviews with Mrs. Jesse Prewitt and Mr. J. T. Boatright

²Ibid.

present is occupied by an Austin family. With the abundance of cedar, most of the old houses were made of logs. Many of these were destroyed by fire, others were converted to barns, sheds and outbuildings with the advent of sawed lumber. With the exception of this one log cabin, which consisted of two log rooms, each fifteen feet square with a fire place and with a "dog trot" twelve feet wide between them, there are no longer traces of any of the original log homes along old Cascade Creek.

Louise Thurm Waechter and her family lived for many years in a log cabin on the land she had received from her father. As the family expanded, there was need for a larger, better house. About 1871 her husband, August, brought a German rock mason to live on the place and build a house for them. The rock was quarried from a vein of limestone south of the house and the lime for the mortar was burned in a pit near the creek crossing leading to the house. A rock shell was raised, measuring approximately fourteen by twenty-eight feet inside. The walls were eighteen to twenty inches thick and the inner area was divided into two rooms by means of a wooden partition. Above the two rooms was a long attic with a window at either end, one of which furnished entry by ladder to the room in the attic. There the boys, six of them, slept with the warmth of the fireplace being brought to them by the chimney running through the attic.

In later years Louise sold her home to Louis J., her son, who made it his home with his wife, Liza Boatright Waechter, for over twenty-five years, adding a frame room to the original two-room rock house. During these years one of L. J.'s summer occupations was the digging of wild plants in the hills. In particular he shipped thousands of clematis to northern nurseries and had a small basement in the house in which he stored his plants until time for shipment. After many years it became necessary for Mr. and Mrs. Waechter to move into Austin because of illness and the home was sold, passing through the hands of R. H. Honeycutt and Guy Hobbs to Wilson L. Richards, who bought it in 1941. Mr. Richards was a student at the University of Texas at the time of his purchase and in 1942 he moved into the three-room house with his wife. In 1947 it again became necessary for the house to be enlarged and, finding the old rock quarry, Mr. Richards opened it and used the rock to build an addition of four rooms (with walls eighteen inches thick) to the original rock rooms. The attic was also expended and now contains three large bedrooms. Other than the log cabin already mentioned, this house is older than any other in the valley.

Isaac Venable built a frame house for his wife on the land her father gave them. The house contained two large rooms, one fourteen feet square and the other one sixteen by fourteen feet in

size. Behind these rooms were two smaller rooms, one the kitchen and the other a bedroom. The hall which divided these rooms was twelve feet wide and twenty feet long. It was here that Mrs. Venable placed her dining table. The house faced east and a long porch ran the length of the house on the front. Mrs. Venable had a well drilled at the edge of the porch so that she had only to step to the bannister and dip the well bucket to have water in the house. After the well was complete, the water was found to be unsatisfactory for household purposes, so a second well was drilled. Mrs. Jesse Prewitt, a daughter of Tena Thurm Venable, lived for a time in this home until her husband purchased the Lee Boatright home. The Venable home was sold at Mrs. Venable's death and the house was torn down to provide lumber for a new house being erected above the old home.

The fact that the hills were heavily-timbered with cedar, there was clear running water in the creek and some field and pasture land along the meanders made the valley a haven for those looking for a home in the Texas hill country where they would also have an occupation. With high hills at either end of the valley and treacherous roads leading out over them, the people tended to live, work and play within the confines of the ridges. They were content living there near a growing city where they could sell their produce and purchase all necessities. With the building of Mansfield Dam on the

Colorado River, many of the younger men found employment outside the valley. With the improvement of the one through road in the valley, many of the people found occupations in the city. The desire to move closer to their work and to put their children in city schools caused them to leave the creek. At the present time there are only two known families living there who are descended from the original settlers. It is families like those described above, pioneering and working together, who have given America its' pride and strength.

Mr. J. E. J., Old Settlers Home, Cedar Park, Texas

Mr. J. W. J., 4406 Parker Avenue, Austin, Texas

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Legal Description

West Township of Travis County, Texas, County Clerk's Office, Travis County Courthouse, Austin, Texas

Map

County of Travis, Texas, Survey of the Texas Department of Agriculture, Austin, Texas, 1910

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Phillips, Mrs. Travis W., 4406 Ramsey Avenue, Austin, Texas

Prewitt, Mrs. Jesse, 4406 Ramsey Avenue, Austin, Texas

Richards, Mr. & Mrs. W. L., Route 4, Box 323, Austin, Texas

Legal Documents

Deed Records of Travis County, Texas, County Clerk's Office, Travis County Courthouse, Austin, Texas

Maps

Gannett, Henry: Texas-Austin Quadrangle, United States Department of the Interior, Geological Survey, 1910

Photographs

Reprints of photographs taken by Wilson L. Richards in 1941



PIC04930

Falls on Bull Creek (old Cascade Creek) above which was located the Walton grist mill. Pool below was known as the old Mill Pond swimming hole.



PICAO+929

Log house on the "Reynolds Place", more recently known as the "Jaeger Place". The cedar log rooms and fireplaces are still in good condition. The house has been remodeled since this photograph was taken (in 1941) and it is now occupied by a family from Austin.



PIC 04928

Rock house built by August and Louise Waechter in 1871.
The frame portion was added by their son, Louis J. Waechter.
This photograph was taken in 1941. The frame part has
since been removed and four rock rooms have been added.



PICA04927

This photograph shows the eastern end of the Reynolds log cabin, together with the smoke house in the side yard.



DIC 04927



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